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A MINISTER'S ACCOUNT OF HIS STEWARDSHIP.

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SERMON,

PREACHED IN NORTHBOROUGH,

OCTOBER 31, 1841.

By JOSEPH ALLEN.

ON THE COMPLETION OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH YEAR OF HIS MINISTRY IN THAT PLACE.

Printed by Request.

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1842.

TO THE MEMBERS

OF THE

FIRST PARISH IN NORTHBOROUGH,

THIS DISCOURSE

IS INSCRIBED BY THEIR FRIEND AND MINISTER,

JOSEPH ALLEN.

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DISCOURSE.

The day has just passed, which completed the twenty-fifth year of my ministry. At its commencement I scarcely dared to look forward to so distant a day; and now that that period has been completed, the retrospect fills my mind with wonder and gratitude. For I feel that I have been privileged above the common lot. My brethren and fathers in the ministry, with whom I was associated at the commencement of this period, where are they? How few remain in the places they then occupied! And what changes have come upon the families to whom I then ministered! A new generation has come up to fill the places deserted by their former occupants. Whole families have been broken up and dispersed, or gathered to their final resting place. The whole appearance of things seems changed. And I am spared and permitted to stand in my lot, as at this day.

It is therefore in accordance with the feelings awakened by the occasion, that I have chosen for my text the words of Paul, recorded in Acts, 26th chapter, 22d verse.

"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day."

Let us then review this period, and bring together some of the most important facts in our Ecclesiastical History, for the last twenty-five years.

It was on the 29th of February, 1816, that the Rev. Peter

Whitney, my immediate predecessor in the ministry, instantaneously expired, in the 72d year of his age, and the 49th of his ministry. Agreeably to the custom which at that time prevailed in the Congregational Churches, the pulpit was supplied for a succession of Sabbaths by the ministers of the neighboring towns. In the mean time opportunity was given to the people to look around for a suitable person to be employed as a candidate for the supply of the vacant pulpit. In the latter part of May, he who now addresses you received an invitation by the committee of the town to preach as a candidate for settlement. And on the first Sabbath in July, his voice was first heard within these walls.

There are some yet with us, who may remember the stillness which pervaded the great assembly, when the speaker announced his text and repeated the words: — "Then Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." — But they do not remember, for they could not know, with what trembling solicitude that discourse was delivered, and the other services of the day were performed. After a probation of eight weeks, the candidate received an invitation from the church and the town to become their minister,* and on the 30th of the following October, he was ordained as the Pastor of the Church and the Minister of the town. The Ordaining Council, (as was usual at that time,) was composed not exclusively of those whose religious sentiments were supposed to be in accordance with those of the candidate.† Indeed, although the same diversities of religious belief existed then as now, and although the sentiments of the candidate were fully avowed, and were well understood in their leading features by those to whom he was called to minister; and, although on this very ground, strenuous efforts were made, principally by individuals from other towns, who professed a great concern, lest the good people of Northborough should be hoodwinked and deceived, to prevent his ordination; yet it was his happiness to live in great peace and friendliness

* See Appendix, Note A. † Appendix, Note B.

both with such of his own hearers, and neighboring ministers, as, on the ground of difference of theological sentiment, had been opposed to his settlement; and a free ministerial intercourse was maintained with the latter, with but few exceptions, for the first twelve or fifteen years of his ministry. *

It may surprise some of the younger part of my hearers, to be told that, where there are now three religious societies there was then but one; that all worshipped in one house, and all contributed to the support of one and the same minister, who was then styled, as he was in fact, *the minister of the town.* Whether greater good or evil has resulted from the change, we have experienced — whether it has contributed to kindly feeling and friendly offices between neighbors, or has awakened more of a jealous and censorious spirit; whether the cause of good learning and good morals and true religion has on the whole been advanced by the multiplication of sects and places of worship, or whether the gain, whatever it may have been, is sufficient to compensate for the increased burden of taxation, and the breaking up of a once harmonious society, and above all, and more than all, for the lessons of uncharitableness which are likely to be instilled into the susceptible minds of youth, let others judge. For myself, however little cause I may have to complain of unkind or ungenerous treatment from the ministers, or the members of the other societies, I cannot look upon the change with entire complacency, or revert to our former union without experiencing some emotions of sadness and sorrow.

But to return to the day and the occasion, whose twenty-fifth anniversary we are called to notice. It would be difficult for those, who have come upon the stage of action since the time when the multiplication of new Societies, and the frequent removal of ministers, have made an ordination an every-day affair, that attracts very little notice, beyond the immediate limits of the parish, to form any adequate conception of the interest of such an occasion at the period referred to.

* See Appendix, Note C.

The interest pervaded the whole community, and extended into neighboring towns. Preparations were made for it on a scale of liberality, which seemed to imply that trouble and expense were of no account. To the inhabitants of Northborough, it was a day of Jubilee, such as had not occurred among them for nearly 50 years; and as might well be supposed it was anticipated and welcomed with great joy. The day at length arrived; and it was one of those serene and mild days, that in our climate commonly intervene between the first frosts and the setting in of winter. Multitudes flock in from the neighboring towns. The church is filled in every part; and great numbers are unable to obtain admittance. After the services are over, the great assembly disperses, and all find a welcome at the well furnished tables that are spread for them in the houses of the inhabitants. The eagerness, with which the invitations are given and pressed even upon strangers, reminds one of Eastern hospitality.

To him on whose account these preparations are made, and who in the presence of this great assembly receives the seals of office, and assumes the solemn responsibilities of the Christian ministry, the occasion is one of thrilling and almost overpowering interest. It forms a new and most important era in his life. It assigns him his field of labor. It establishes new and interesting relations. According to Congregational usage it gives him authority to administer the Christian ordinances, and by the laws of the land it empowers him to solemnize marriages. It gives him access to the chamber of sickness, and to the house of mourning, to administer the counsels and consolations of religion to the children of suffering and sorrow.

Under such circumstances it is not surprising, that the responsibilities of the pastoral office press upon the young and inexperienced minister with a great weight, and lead him to feel how utterly insufficient he is for meeting them in his own strength.

Pardon me, my hearers, if I linger a few moments longer on the bright morning of my ministry, before adverting to

some of the prominent events which have marked the day which it ushered in. There are some present who can, with me, bring before them the scenes and the characters which I shall call up — on whose memories they are traced with a vividness which make them seem like life and reality. And there are others, it may be, who can sympathize with their pastor in the emotions which are awakened in his bosom by the retrospect.

The appearance presented by this church on the following Sabbath rises up before him, and the images of those who occupied the well-filled pews present themselves with great distinctness to his mind. There sat the fathers and the mothers of those who now occupy the same seats, almost every householder being the owner and occupant of a pew. There were gathered by the side of them their little domestic flocks; or where the number was too great, seated in another part of the house. There, too, was a large and well disciplined choir of singers under a leader of skill and taste.* And the house in every part was filled with attentive and apparently serious worshippers. And I may add, such was the appearance presented not only on extraordinary occasions, but Sabbath after Sabbath in all seasons, when the weather permitted — during the early part of my ministry. Very few then habitually absented themselves from public worship, and the occasional absence of any one, who made any pretensions to respectability, was noticed as a remarkable occurrence, and led to inquiries into its cause. Nor were slight causes deemed a sufficient apology for absence. Even in the most inclement season of the year, and before the thought of warming churches by furnaces or stoves had been entertained, it was common for whole families — not a few of the more hardy and resolute members only — to attend church regularly, morning and evening, every Sabbath. And there were those, and some may be still living, who could make it their boast, that for years they never once failed for a single Sabbath to be present in their accustomed seats on the Lord's day.

* See Appendix, Note D.

On that first Sabbath of my ministry, I addressed the congregation on the reciprocal duties of pastor and people, taking for my text the words, "Who is sufficient for these things?" At the time of my settlement the town contained nearly 800 inhabitants, and probably about 150 families. The proportion of communicants was, I believe, large for that day — consisting of about 120, one third of whom were males, and two thirds females. Most of the church members, however, especially the brethren of the church, were old, or had passed the middle period of life, scarcely any young heads of families, or youths of either sex belonging to the church.

Such was the field of labor into which I was introduced. It was not an uncultivated waste, but a fertile field, which bore marks of the skill and fidelity of former laborers. It was a small town, but the people were intelligent, public-spirited, and united. There was an unusual number of men in the prime of life, mostly heads of families, respectable in their appearance, and constant attendants on public worship. It was often remarked by the ministers, with whom I exchanged, and by strangers, who visited us, that they had seldom seen a better looking congregation than at that time occupied these seats on the Lord's day. Methinks I can see them now — the venerable fathers, and the strong and healthy middle-aged men who then lined these aisles, of whom but a scattered few now remain. Methinks I can see, too, the pleasant faces and hear the melodious voices of those who then sung the songs of Zion. But they too have disappeared, and but one now retains his place in the choir, and only a scattered few are found in our midst.

But it is time that I advert to some of the principal changes that have been introduced, and some of the most important incidents that have occurred in our ecclesiastical history during the last twenty-five years. It will be convenient for me to review my ministry in three distinct periods of about eight years each; as it was nearly at the expiration of each of the two former periods, that the most important changes in our ecclesiastical condition took place.

During the first seven or eight years, only one family, so far as I can recollect, withdrew from my ministry and support, and attended worship in a neighboring town.* And although some efforts were made at an early period to introduce preaching of a different character, they met with very little encouragement, and the people remained united, and steadfast, and immovable; and most of those, who on the ground of a difference of theological opinion had opposed my settlement, and among them the two venerable and excellent deacons of this church, were constant attendants on my ministry, and showed me every mark of confidence and friendship, that could be desired. One of them has gone to his reward, and one is still living, of whose continued respect and friendliness, though he is no longer with us, I have never for a moment doubted.† During this period I felt that I was in truth the minister of the town. I solemnized all the marriages, attended all the funerals, visited all the sick and afflicted, and looked upon all the children in the place as lambs of my flock, and have reason to believe that I was looked upon by them with affectionate esteem. As was natural under such circumstances, the principal direction of the schools, as in the choice of books, the methods of teaching, &c. was placed in my hands, a sacred trust, which, however it may have been abused, I have been permitted to hold, through all the changes that we have experienced in our ecclesiastical affairs, without interruption for twenty-five years.‡ During this first third of

* See Appendix, Note E.

† See Appendix, Note F.

‡ The office of a School Committee-man, at least of the Chairman, is no sinecure. Besides the time taken up in the meetings of the board, the examination of candidates, the taking of the annual census, and the preparation of the annual reports to the town and the Board of Education, the schools in the six districts are to be visited each at least four times in the year, making in all twenty-four visitations. I have no doubt that the average number of visitations that I have made of the schools in this town would exceed this number for each of the 25 years of my minsistry. Assuming that as the average number, the whole would amount to 600, occupying nearly as many half days. For several years, the committee devoted a day to the last examination of each of the winter schools, carrying their dinners with them, and spending most of the intermission in a

my ministry, all the children in the town received religious instruction under my direction in our common schools, and were personally instructed by the minister in his visitations of the schools, and at general *catechisings*, as they were called, which took place once at least in the year. And during the latter part of this period, or about the year 1820, religious instruction, with the Bible for a text book, began to be given on the Sabbath by teachers appointed for that purpose, which soon led to the more perfect organization of our Sunday School, viz. in the spring of 1824.

It was about this time that, by the direction of the Worcester Association, I prepared, for the use of children and youth, the Catechism in three parts, known under the name of "The Worcester Catechism," and which was followed some years after by Questions on the Gospels and Acts, in three small volumes, and a fourth on Genesis, which are now extensively used in the Churches of our denomination.* Although it properly belongs to the second division of my ministerial life, I will here advert to the origin of our Lyceum, an institution which has exerted, it is believed, no inconsiderable influence on the cause of education and good morals. It was in the winter of 1826-7, that I commenced a course of twelve lectures on Astronomy in the Town Hall, which was followed by two similar courses, consisting of twelve lectures each, on several departments in Natural History and Natural Philosophy, in the two next years, the concluding lecture of each course being given in the Meetinghouse, with other religious services. This was the origin of our Lyceum, one of the earliest institutions of the kind, which, owing to the patronage

careful examination of the writings. And this has always been done, at least so far as the Chairman is concerned, without pecuniary compensation, though not without reward.

It is a fact honorable to the town, that four of our school-houses have been rebuilt within a few years, at an expense of more than $5000; and the town is pledged to rebuild the one in the East district in the coming year. In the mean time, the annual appropriation for the schools has been increased from $500 to $900.

*See Appendix, Note G.

and encouragement it has received from a liberal-minded community, has continued to flourish up to the present time. For fifteen winters in succession, lectures on a great variety of subjects, many of them of a very high order of excellence, have been given in our Town Hall every Wednesday evening, during the continuance of our winter schools.—Nor, judging from the past, has the interest in this institution abated in the least degree, and it is only to be regretted that a hall of ampler dimensions has not yet been provided for the accommodation of the increasing numbers who wish to attend.

Regarding a good Library as an efficient means of promoting the cause of education, the formation of such an institution was one of the earliest objects to which my efforts were directed. The result was the formation of "The Young Ladies' Library," in the spring of 1817, under the direction of an association consisting at first of about sixty young ladies, who were accustomed for several years to hold meetings one afternoon in each week, and afterwards once in two weeks, during six months in the year, bringing their work with them, and while engaged in their labors, listening to the reading by their pastor of such books, generally of a moral and religious character, as he had selected for that purpose. By the proceeds of their labor they were soon able to purchase a valuable library, besides contributing a handsome sum every year to charitable purposes. Of the propitious influences of this institution, not only upon its members but upon the whole town, no one acquainted with the facts will doubt. There was at that time only one Library in town, which had had its day, but consisting principally of works on theology and religion, and those of an older date, the library was, I believe, little read, and excited but little interest in the young.

The Young Ladies' Library is still in existence, and it might be well to inquire, if it might not be revived and made more useful, than it now is, to those who are coming upon the stage of life, as it was to those for whom it was originally formed.

It was just at the close of this part of my ministry, viz.

May, 1824, that the wants of a younger class of persons were met by the establishment of a Juvenile or Sunday School Library. The subject was first proposed to the Church, May 7, 1824, and the first contribution for its support was made on the 16th of the same month. I mention these dates, because I suppose it is one of the oldest institutions of the kind in New England, that is, of a Free Juvenile Library, supported by an annual contribution of the Society. It has always been an object of interest to the children and youth in this place, and the annual contributions for its support have been creditable to the town and parish. Many of the books have been worn out or lost, but these have been replaced by others, so that the library now contains more than four hundred volumes.

In this connexion I may mention what belongs to a later period, that the foundation of the Free Parish Library, which is kept in the projection of the Meetinghouse, was laid by a donation from the pastor of fifty volumes, which was accepted by a vote of the Church, in May, 1827, on the condition, that it be placed under the control of the Church, and that it remain forever a charitable library, deriving its support only from voluntary donations or contributions. On the following December, it was greatly enlarged by the addition of the books belonging to the old "Social Library," which by nearly an unanimous vote of the proprietors was united with and merged in it. It has also been increased by annual contribution, and now contains more than four hundred volumes, and is free for the use of all persons residing in the town.

Of the Young Men's Library, which was formed at a subsequent period, and which contains many valuable books, as not belonging exclusively to the first parish, I forbear to speak.

Most of the institutions I have mentioned had their origin in the early part of my ministry, and I trust I may say without the imputation of vanity, that they are indebted for their existence and success in some measure to efforts, which I was

led to make in their behalf, but more, much more I feel bound in justice to admit, to the liberal spirit with which these efforts were met and seconded. Among a people of a different spirit, much more strenuous and better directed efforts might have been lost.

I have now reviewed the first third of my ministry, spoken of the state of this religious society, when it was committed to my pastoral care, and of some of the measures, which were adopted for the improvement of the people. Let no one think that this review awakens in the pastor only pleasing emotions, or that it is accompanied by self-gratulation and self-applause; for although he can truly say, that he has ever had the interests of this people, and of the whole people, at heart, and earnestly desired their highest good, he is too deeply conscious of his many deficiences and defects to boast of the little good he may have done; and often has he felt, that he was wholly undeserving of the congratulations, with which he has been met at home and abroad, on account of the high character of our schools, and the general prosperity of the religious society to which he ministers, as though this had been the result of his labors. He is humbled and sometimes almost overwhelmed, by thinking of the numerous opportunities for usefulness that have not been improved, of the imperfections of his public services, and of the many instances, in which he has omitted to give utterance to truths, that ought to have been spoken, or at the time when they were most urgently called for. Especially has he felt this when those, who might have been benefitted by words seasonably and fitly spoken, have been suddenly and unexpectedly removed beyond the reach of his voice, before they had given any satisfactory evidence of their being qualified for the kingdom of heaven. How far the changes in our ecclesiastical condition, which I am about to notice, were occasioned by ministerial unfaithfulness, and whether they might have been prevented in whole or in part, by a more wise, devoted, and earnest ministry, I leave it for others to judge. However much I lamented them at the time, I trust I can now speak

of those changes in a kind and forbearing spirit, and without a particle of bitterness or acrimony. For myself, when I consider how long our union and harmony were permitted to last, and how few of those, who had been in favor of my settlement, have been alienated from me, and how few of those, who have ever been connected with this society, have forsaken my ministry, and when I think of the many proofs of confidence and affection, which, in the most trying scenes that we have passed through, I have received from the people to whom I ministered, — when I call to mind the encouragements and aids, by which I have been enabled to carry into execution the plans I had formed for the promotion of learning and religion, especially when I advert to the pleasant and friendly intercourse I have maintained, with but few exceptions, with the ministers and members of the other churches in this town, and contrast it with the revilings, and contentions, and alienations, which so often exist between rival sects in other places, I feel that, instead of complaining of hardship, or repining at my lot, I am bound to give thanks to God for the desirableness of the condition, in which I have been placed, and for the abounding mercies, with which he has crowned my life and my ministry.

I have spoken of the peacefulness of the first part of my ministry. The appearance during this period of almost entire union and harmony among my people may have led to a relaxation of effort on my part, and without a seasonable check, might have awakened in me an undue self-complacency, and not only had an unpropitious influence on my character, but have rendered my ministry unprofitable and contemptible. Such a check was given, when, sometime in the year 1822, meetings began to be held in private houses by a Baptist minister from a neighboring town, which were attended by a good many of my people, and when, in April of the following year, an attempt was made by some dissatisfied persons to obtain the use of the Town House, then just erected, for the purpose of holding religious or prayer meetings at such times as they might choose. The attempt was

unsuccessful, but it roused me to a sense of my danger, and prompted me to new and increased efforts, and I trust made me a better man, and a more devoted minister. I find in comparing the discourses, written before and after this *crisis* in my ministry, as I have ever regarded it, that the latter breathe a more fervent, earnest, evangelical spirit than the former. And when on the following month an esteemed member of my Church, one who had joined it in the early part of my ministry, applied for a dismission, on the ground that "she could not be edified by my preaching," it cut me to the heart, and led me to inquire if I had indeed been so unfaithful to my high trust.* I find in the record, that I made at the time, the following reflections occasioned by the events, to which I have referred, and which show how I was affected by them.

"I think it is my desire to do good, let not this desire be weakened, let it rather be strengthened by the discouragements I am called to experience. Should those who have been my friends withdraw from my ministry, and endeavor to draw others after them, let me not be disheartened or dismayed. Let it not tempt me to withdraw my affection from them, or to labor and pray the less earnestly for their spiritual good."

These measures being persevered in for several years resulted in the formation of the Baptist Society, Febuary 3d, 1827, and the erection of a Church for their accommodation. The new Society, however, was small. But few withdrew from my ministry, and the Church of which I was pastor continued to be the only Congregational Church in the town, till after the completion of another third of my ministry.†

It was during this second period, that a new system of ministerial exchanges was introduced into our churches, and ministers were compelled to take sides, and all ministerial intercourse and Christian communion between the two great parties, into which Congregational Churches were divided,

* See Appendix, Note H. † See Appendix, Note I.

was prohibited by those who had spiritual power to carry their decrees into execution.* Some nobly resisted, and in consequence lost their standing and influence, and in some instances their places. Some held out for a time, but afterwards weakly succumbed, and, reluctantly and with many misgivings, gave in their adherence to the new measures. The result was the introduction of the Exclusive System, as it was called, into nearly all the Congregational Churches reputed Orthodox, several years before the organization of the Evangelical Church in this town. So that from this time my exchanges from necessity were almost exclusively confined to those ministers who were ranked on the liberal side. There were a few honorable exceptions, both in this neighborhood and in other places. There were ministers who had too much catholicism, and independence, and firmness to submit to the dictation of others, and who continued long to maintain a liberal system of ministerial and Christian intercourse.†

It was not till the spring of 1832, that a schism was made in the old Congregational Church of Northborough. A few individuals (three), had indeed, as early as the year 1830, asked and obtained a dismission from this Church, and a recommendation to the Evangelical Church in Berlin.‡

At length, early in the winter of 1832, measures were set on foot to form another religious society in this town — meetings were held at private houses, and preachers obtained from neighboring towns, and on the 8th of the following April, this church was called to act on the request of six persons, two males and four females, to be dismissed from our watch and care, with testimonials of their Christian character, in order that they might be prepared to be connected with a church soon to be organized, to be denominated "The Evangelical Congregational Church of Northborough," whose request was granted by an unanimous vote of the brethren.§ The new

* See Appendix, Note K.
† Appendix, Note L.
‡ Appendix, Note M.
§ Appendix, Note N.

Church was organized on the 12th of the same month, at a public meeting in this house, the use of which was granted for that purpose, on which occasion a discourse was delivered by Rev. J. S. C. Abbott, then of Worcester, on Matthew x. 34, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword."

This event brings me to the last third division of my ministry, soon after which time, viz. April 23, 1832, I ceased to be the minister of the town, this religious Society being at that date, organized as the First Parish, as it has remained to this time.

It was in the preceding year, that the town received a munificent bequest from H. Gassett, Esq. of Boston, with a provision that five sixths of the interest of it, so soon as it should amount to four thousand dollars, should go towards the payment of the salary of the minister of the Congregational Church, which, as you are aware, has been available for several years, and now pays more than one third of my stated salary.*

The hope was doubtless entertained by the donor, that he should by this means do something towards preventing in his native town the divisions, which had at that time become common, and which in small towns especially he with others deprecated as a serious evil. Whether its influence shall prove salutary or prejudicial to the society, which is thus relieved of a part of the burden of supporting the institutions of religion, remains to be seen. Should it have the effect, that ministerial funds have had in some places, of leading the society to feel little interest in what costs them but little, so as to be reluctant to make any efforts or sacrifices for keeping the house of God in repair, for the encouragement of sacred music, or for the honorable support of the ministry; if it should prove the occasion of contention and discord instead of union and peace; especially if it should have a palsying and deadening influence upon the cause of vital religion; not only will the benevolent designs

* See Appendix, Note O.

by the donor be frustrated, but the evil will greatly counterbalance any good that may accrue from the donation. It will be the part of wisdom to guard against the evils to which I have adverted, that so "The Gassett Fund," as it is called, may prove a help and not a hindrance to your true prosperity.

In looking back at this distance of time to the changes in the external condition of this religious society to which I have adverted, I find it difficult to recal the feelings they awakened in my bosom while they were recent. Those feelings were of the most painful character. They affected me more deeply than any other events in my ministry or in my life. They seriously injured my health, and at one time I feared that they might soon terminate my ministry and my life. This may be accounted for in part by the fact of my having been settled as a minister of the town, and by the circumstance that, having lived in great harmony with my people for so many years, I had come to look upon all who attended on my ministry as rightfully belonging to me,— as in fact members of a family of which I was constituted head. The children and youth had received instruction at my hands; their faces had become familiar to me; I was known of them and they of me; and I looked upon them with interest and affection as lambs of my flock. There was not a family in town which I was not accustomed to visit, and in which I was not received with apparent welcome; and few were the houses in which I had not been called to perform the last sad offices of humanity, and to minister the consolations of religion to the sick and the dying, the bereaved and the forsaken.

Under these circumstances it is not perhaps surprising that I should be deeply grieved and afflicted, when one after another of those whom I loved were induced to withdraw from my ministry, and to seek instruction elsewhere. The case is different where a minister is settled over a divided flock, or over a society composed of one of the fragments into which a town has been broken up.

But I soon became in a measure reconciled to the change which was so painful at first, and though I cannot cease to la-

ment the disruption of old ties, I now feel that God meant it for good ; and I have a strong conviction that no part of my ministry has been more prosperous or accompanied with more solid satisfaction, than that comprised within the period I am now reviewing.

In illustration of this remark I will mention the fact, that of the 158 persons that have been admitted to this church during my ministry, nearly one half have joined it since the 1st of May, 1832, and considerably more than one half in the last ten years. The largest number was in 1836, when 22 united themselves with this church. Nor have we often occasion to complain of empty pews ; and all would be occupied every Sabbath, should all that are legally connected with this Society with their families attend public worship, as constantly as do some, and as was the good old custom in the days of our fathers.

As it respects the support of religious institutions, it certainly should not be felt as a burden in a society, where one third of it is provided for by a permanent and accumulating fund, especially when it is considered how great sacrifices are made for this object by other churches of our own or different denominations, both in and out of New England.

No one, I am sure, will understand me as saying this from any personal considerations, as though I were pleading in my own behalf. You know me too well, to suppose that I should be willing to remain here a single day, as an incumbrance and a burden, or when it was thought that my services were not worth as much as they cost. I say it for your encouragement, my brethren, and if need be, your admonition, that you may duly appreciate your privileges, and know in this your day the things which belong to your peace, before they shall be hidden from your eyes. I will mention in this connexion that the number of families connected with this religious Society is about 120. Of the individuals, who are taxed for its support, the whole number is 138, of whom only 16 pay over five dollars each, while 53 pay less than one dollar, and 69 between 1 and 5 each. Our Society oas diminished somewhat in numbers and in strength, by the withdrawal of some of its

former members ; but it may still be regarded as a strong Society, fully competent to sustain itself, without depending on foreign aid. Our Sunday School too has contained on an average a larger number of pupils, the last five or six years, than at any former period since it was established.* I think we have reason to congratulate ourselves on this state of things, and to bless God for his goodness, that our union, peace, and prosperity have to so great a degree been preserved, and that we have been permitted to retain our Christian privileges as we do this day.

It was during this last period that we were furnished with a commodious Vestry, and that our ungainly pulpit was exchanged for the beautiful one which now fills its place ; and that other additions were made to the comfort and elegance of this goodly edifice, which our fathers builded, and which we have inherited. Peace be with in these walls, and prosperity within our borders, and let " Holiness to the Lord " be inscribed on all the parts and appurtenances of this house of prayer, and this temple of the Most High.†

But our fathers who builded this house, and their sons, who occupied these seats, 25 years ago — where are they ? The aged matrons too, and the young mothers, and the youthful band of sons and daughters, who sat by their side, where are they ? How few of them are present to take part in the solemnities of this hour. Those who were aged have all gone, or perhaps one or two remain, the feeble remnants of a former generation. The middle aged have grown old, or have already been gathered to their fathers. And of those who were then young, how many have found their graves in other places, or sleep in the graves of their kindred at home !

I look around for those strong men, and those worthy matrons, and those blooming youths with whom I was so pleasantly associated in the first years of my ministry, I call to mind their looks, and tones of voice, and I cannot forget their acts of personal kindness, and their readiness to every good work. But I miss them from their accustomed seats. I visit

* See Appendix, Note P. † See Appendix, Note Q.

their houses; but their houses are no longer called after their names, or another generation has taken possession of them. I linger among the places of the dead, and read their names on the monuments that affection has reared over their graves.

Of the 800 persons of all ages that we numbered at the beginning of the last Quarter Century, how few (only about 150) yet remain with us, and are now reckoned with the 1200 now found within our borders!

I consult the records of the Parish, and I find that the number of deaths in the town during the period of 25 years is 382, on an average somewhat more than fifteen in a year, and including all but about 50 of those who were heads of families at the time of my settlement. On nearly as many funeral occasions, including those which I have attended in other towns, have I been called to officiate. How many of these were occasions of deep, heart-rending grief, the memory of which is yet vivid on the minds of surviving friends. And some were scenes of moral sublimity, which could scarcely fail to strengthen our faith in the power, and unrivalled worth of religion, and to lift our thoughts above this dying world.*

With how many afflicted parents, weeping in anguish over their withered hopes; with how many orphan children left in their weakness and inexperience to make their way alone without the guidance of their natural guardians; with how many of all ages and conditions have I been called to sympathize, and minister the consolations of religion, in their bereavement and affliction!

On occasions of joy too I have been present, and tendered my congratulations and good wishes to those, whose union in the holy bonds of wedlock I had solemnized by religious rites.

But were the hopes awakened on these interesting occasions always realized? How soon in some instances was the joy of the bridal hour turned into mourning and bitter disappointment. Three hundred and twenty-eight persons, have I joined in holy wedlock; of which number, as nearly as I can ascertain, no fewer than fifty-six have already exchanged the

* See Appendix, Note R.

wedding garment for the funeral shroud, and only forty couples in all are now inhabitants of this town.

But lest your patience and my strength should be exhausted, I must hasten to a close.

I have reviewed the whole period during which I have been permitted to minister at this altar. The narrative has been long, but I could not well abridge it. Having labored among you for a Quarter of a Century, it was my wish to give you a plain and simple account of my stewardship, during this comparatively long period ; for I have been longer in the ministry than any of my brethren of any denomination in either of the six towns which border on this ; and with one exception I am the oldest in the association to which I belong.

The review I have taken has awakened in my bosom emotions of gratitude and joy. I can truly say that I have had a pleasant ministry and have led a happy life ; for I have been blessed in my domestic relations, have been surrounded by kind friends, have been preserved from severe and protracted sickness, having never been confined to the sick bed for a single day, and only on two or three occasions, and then with a single exception in very inclement weather, prevented by indisposition from standing in my place on the Lord's day.

With wonder and deep thankfulness, do I also call to mind, that, while the family over which I have presided has been uncommonly large, consisting often of more than twenty members, and while more than one hundred and fifty different individuals, besides those to whom I am nearly allied, have, for periods of from three months to as many years, dwelt under my roof, although in several instances lives very dear have been brought into jeopardy, so that the hope of recovery had almost vanished, *death has never yet entered our dwelling*, nor have parents or children been called to part. " Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." What of good or evil Providence has in store for you or for me, time only can disclose. May we meet it, whatever it may be, with a submissive spirit, and a trustful and thankful heart, and " learn in whatsoever state we may be, therewith to be content."

It would be a foolish presumption in me to look forward to the completion of another quarter of a century. My ministry, and, I may add, my life, have already been protracted beyond the expectation I had dared to entertain, when I first came among you. I trust, I shall be prepared for the termination of either, whenever in the Providence of God it shall be brought to a close.

God grant that I may then be able to give a good account of my stewardship, and that you, my dear brethren and friends, with many of the precious ones who have already gone to *the better land*, may be my joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord.

"And now, brethren," in the words of the Apostle Paul, "I commend you to God and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified," to whom be glory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

APPENDIX.

Note A. Page 4.

The vote of the church stood 27 in the affirmative and 7 in the negative. The town concurred with the church in the invitation by a vote of 107 to 11, the members of the church voting with the rest of the inhabitants; so that the dissentients in the whole town were but eleven. Of these eleven, it may be remarked, nearly all remained attached to this society, attended regularly on my ministry, and manifested their friendliness in every suitable way. In all the changes that subsequently took place, some of them stood firm and immovable, of whom some remain unto this day.

Note B. Page 4.

The Ordaining Council was composed of the pastors and delegates of churches in the following places.

Shrewsbury,	The College Church in	Cambridge,
Berlin,	Mr. Abbott's of	Salem,
Boylston,		Medfield,
Marlborough,	Mr. Frothingham's of	Boston,
Worcester,		Lunenburgh,
Westborough,		Quincy,
Lancaster,		Waltham.

In the presence of this Council the pastor elect was called upon to give a summary of his theological views, and of the leading purposes and aims with which he entered the ministry. This not giving satisfaction to all the members of the Council, a great number of questions were put to him in relation to his faith, to each of which he endeavored to give an explicit answer, in accordance with the dictates of his conscience. It was a trying occasion, and one from which a young man would naturally shrink. But on most of the points on which I was questioned I had, as I thought, clear and definite ideas, whether true or false, and I was not ashamed to avow them, believing them to be in har-

mony with the word of God, and suited to have a propitious influence on those who should receive them. Besides, I knew that I was surrounded by friends, and I well remember how much I was encouraged and sustained by the benignant looks and kind words of that good old man (Dr. Sumner, of Shrewsbury) who presided over the Council. The result was, that one of the pastors (Rev. E. Rockwood, of Westborough,) and two delegates, Deacon Forbes, of Westborough, and Deacon Fay, of Berlin, voted against the ordination. Dr. Puffer, of Berlin, declined voting, but took a part in the public services, which were as follows: —

Introductory Prayer, by Mr. Whitney, of Quincy.
Sermon, by Prof. Ware, on Jer. xv. 19.
Consecrating Prayer, by President Kirkland.
Charge, by Dr. Sanders, of Medfield.
Right Hand of Fellowship, by Mr. Abbott, of Salem.
Concluding Prayer, by Dr. Puffer, of Berlin.

Note C. Page 5.

There was not one of the Congregational ministers in the neighboring towns, with whom I did not exchange ministerial labors. Once I exchanged pulpits with the Rev. Mr. Rockwood, of Westborough, who, it will be recollected, had voted against my ordination. In all such cases it was my custom scrupulously to avoid debatable ground, and to select such discourses as I supposed would not interfere with the theological views of the minister whose pulpit I occupied. This courtesy was generally, I believe, though not always, reciprocated. In some instances confidence has been abused, and the voice of a stranger has sometimes sounded harsh and discordant notes in a pulpit not his own.

In the church at Westborough, at the time of my exchange with its pastor, the custom prevailed, which I believe was common at an earlier period, and which may even now be retained in some churches, of reading in public, *Relations of Experience*, as they were called, written or dictated by candidates for admission into the church. Two such *Relations* were put into my hands, by the pastor, with the request that I would read them before the congregation, which I accordingly did. The same custom prevailed in the church of which I was originally a member, — the Congregational church in Medfield, — under the care of its excellent pastor, the late Rev. Dr. Prentiss. And although in many instances these Relations were discreet and proper, and such as could hardly fail to awaken the sympathies of the audience, I can well recollect instances when, young as I was, I felt that they contained confessions of guilt, altogether improper to be made before a promiscuous assembly, if, indeed, they should be heard out of the sanctuary of the closet of one's devotions.

Note D. Page 7.

Mr. Cephas Newhall, now of Sterling, then an inhabitant of this town, was the leader of our Choir here referred to, of whom it is no more than justice to say that, in the selection of appropriate tunes, in adapting the tones to the sentiments expressed, and in exercising a sort of magic influence over the whole Choir, so as literally to be their *leader*, drawing them along after him insensibly and without effort, he was surpassed by few.

On the day of my ordination, the singers' seats were filled, — the ladies being tastefully adorned with white turbans and blue ribbons. *Italy*, which was sung to the 278th hymn in Belknap, has been ever since one of my favorite tunes, and I never hear it, without a vivid recollection of the occasion when, as an ordained minister, I first listened to its sweet notes.

It should be added, in justice to our Choir, that, sustained as it ever has been by the patronage of the Society, it has always been respectable ; and that those, who, from time to time, have belonged to it, have generally exhibited a spirit of condescension and mutual forbearance and friendliness, which is highly commendable, and which has prevented in a great measure those collisions and dissensions, of which we sometimes hear in other places, and of which the consequences are sometimes so disastrous. Money has been appropriated by the Society for the support of a singing school, commonly as often as once in two or three years. At the time I came to this place, Watts's Psalms and Hymns were in use. Belknap was substituted for Watts on Thanksgiving day, about one month after my ordination. Belknap was retained till January, 1835, when Greenwood's beautiful selection of Hymns was substituted for it, and gives, I believe, universal satisfaction.

Note E. Page 9.

The statement in the text, as I have ascertained, is not strictly correct. The family alluded to was that of Mr. Asaph Rice, who, with his wife asked a dismission from this Church, and a recommendation to the Church in Westborough, under the pastoral care of Rev. Mr. Rockwood. The request was granted by a vote of the Church, passed July 18, 1819. Mr. Rice had previously, viz. June 6, 1817, filed a certificate that he belonged to the Baptist Society in Westborough.

Mr. Rice was the only *Church member* that withdrew from my ministry and support by filing a certificate with the Town Clerk, till near the time of the formation of the Evangelical Society. During the first seven years, the following persons, in addition to those alluded to, "signed off," as it was called ; namely, Joel Brigham, Edward Bigelow, Benjamin Flagg, Eli Fairbanks, and Ezra Brown, all of whom connected themselves with the Baptist Societies in the neighboring towns. Before the death of Rev. Mr. Whitney,

eight others had withdrawn their support from this Society, and connected themselves with other denominations; namely, Seth Grout, Esq., Lewis Allen, Arte Patterson, Elijah F. Valentine, Benjamin Warren, Elijah Fay, and Rice Fay, Baptists, and John C. Davis, Methodist.

There was only one other secession, (John Rider, in 1826,) till 1827–8, during which years the following persons filed certificates as belonging to the Baptist Society in Northborough, then just formed; namely, Lyman Allen, Brigham Patterson, Jeremiah Hunt, John E. Hunt, Joseph Hunt, Elmer Valentine, Benjamin Rice, and Samuel Wood.

Note F. Page 9.

Deacon Isaac Davis, the father of Gov. Davis, remained a deacon of this Church till Nov. 18, 1825, a few months before he died. He had, a short time before his last sickness, June 25, 1824, made a present to the Church of a silver cup, which cost $27, and in his last sickness he showed his attachment to the Church, by giving directions to his family to procure a handsome linen cloth for the Communion Table. He died April 26, 1826, aged 77; and on the following Sabbath, his remains were brought into the Church, on which occasion a funeral discourse, on Hebrews iv. 9, "There remaineth a rest therefore to the people of God," was delivered by his pastor, who had visited him in his sickness, and who, notwithstanding a difference in belief, thinks that he shared his confidence and friendship to the last.

An elegant marble monument has been erected by his children over his remains, with this just and beautiful epitaph:

"Isaac Davis, born at Rutland, Feb. 1749. Died April 26, 1826.
Æt. 77 years.
As a representative of the people, he was honest; as a magistrate of the country, just; as a Christian, humble, but inspired with hope; as a citizen, exemplary and useful; as a husband and parent, virtuous and affectionate."

Since the discourse was written, the other deacon alluded to, Nahum Fay, Esq., has paid the last debt of nature, and gone to his reward. He died, Nov. 16, 1841, aged 84 years. Deacon Fay remained an officer of the Congregational Church till Feb. 26, 1832, when, on account of his age and infirmities, he requested to be excused from further service as a deacon. During the whole of this period, of more than fifteen years, Deacon Fay not only was connected with this Church as a member and an officer, but took a warm interest in its prosperity, and seconded the measures, proposed by the pastor from time to time, to promote learning, morality, and piety. He was for many years an efficient member of the School Committee, took an early and decided stand in favor of the great Temperance reform, and as a magistrate and citizen, acquitted himself as a man of integrity and

religious principle. He had filled the office of Town Clerk forty-one years in succession, namely, from 1789 to 1830, had kept school forty winters, continuing in that employment till he was sixty years old, had served the town as a Selectman forty years, most of that time as Chairman of the board, and held various other offices of honor and trust to the acceptance of the town.

I love to recal the scenes and occasions in which I have been associated with the *good deacons* of my Church. For whatever reproach may have been brought upon the office in other places by the conduct and character of some, who have borne the name, and discharged the office of a deacon, it has not been so with us. Of the four who have served in that office since the commencement of my ministry, and who have ceased from their mortal labors, I may be permitted to say, that they were each and all honorable men; men of inflexible integrity, enjoying a large share of the public confidence, and justly entitled to be considered as among "the fathers of the town." With us, therefore, the office of deacon is honorable, and the title is never used as a term of reproach, unless by the low and worthless, and those who make a mock of Religion itself.

At the time of my ordination, Deacons Davis and Fay were in office. Deacon Davis was succeeded by Jonas Bartlett, who died Nov. 21, 1839, aged 69, and Deacon Fay by Samuel Seaver, who died Jan. 25, 1838, aged 69. Daniel Brewer and Samuel Seaver are their successors in office. It was the custom here till about the year 1830, for the deacons, with their wives, to dine with their pastor on Communion Sundays, and on the preceding day, to send to the parsonage a piece of meat to be cooked for the occasion.

Note G. Page 10.

Among other measures which I adopted during the earlier part of my ministry for the improvement of the young, I will mention the annual "Lecture to the Schools," which was always to me an occasion of deep interest, as I believe it was to the inhabitants of the town generally. These lectures were given at the close of the Winter Schools, all the children and youth in the town being expected to attend. The first lecture was given on the 10th of April, 1817, on which occasion 260 children met at the public house, then kept by Mr. Abraham Munroe, where they were arranged in divisions, according to their respective districts, each teacher at the head of his school, after which they marched in procession, under the direction of marshals, to the Church, which was thronged on the occasion, and where they listened to an Address on Proverbs iv. 7. This custom was preserved for ten or twelve years, when, the interest having somewhat abated, it was thought expedient to lay it aside, and to adopt something else as a substitute. After the organization of our Sunday School, suitable occasions for ad-

dressing the children were furnished by this institution. We have had four Sunday School or Juvenile Celebrations of the Fourth of July, namely, in 1836, 1837, 1838, 1841, all of which, especially the second, were occasions of most thrilling interest to old and young. The Worcester Association of Sunday School Teachers has also twice met here, when the children of our Sunday School assembled in the house of God, to listen to the counsels of the experienced and the wise, who sought to win their young hearts to the choice and pursuit of heavenly wisdom.

Our Sunday School, as has been stated, was organized in 1824; so that it has now been in operation eighteen years, during the whole of which period, with occasional seasons of depression, it has maintained a respectable standing. The number of scholars has varied from 120 to 230, and the number of teachers from 20 to 35, about one third of whom have been males, and the remaining two thirds females. Of some of those who have filled this office, it would be no more than justice to say, that they labored on year after year without discouragement, regularly attending the Teachers' Meetings, seldom absent from their places on the Sabbath, and devoting themselves with great assiduity to the religious instruction of the children committed to their care. Some of them still remain with us, — others are removed to other spheres of duty and usefulness, — and some have gone to their reward. Of the amount of good influence which they have exerted upon the young minds with which they have thus come in contact, it would not be possible to form an estimate. It will be known when the great day of reckoning shall come; and great shall be the reward of the faithful, devoted, affectionate Sunday School Teacher.

The library connected with the Sunday School was commenced the same year that the School was organized; and although it is still an object of interest with the young, it would be difficult for those who have enjoyed the privilege of taking books from it for many years, to conceive of the eagerness with which the books were sought after, and the avidity with which they were devoured by those who were children seventeen years ago. The annual contributions for the library have varied from $14 to $31, averaging over $20 a year, — the whole amounting to $371 65. One year, (1839,) the Parish made a grant of $50 for the use of the Sunday School. I take pleasure in recording the fact, that a poor blind man, (John N. Butler,) wishing to show his gratitude for the kindness he has experienced from the members of a parish, to which he does not belong, has chosen annually to contribute his mite (and few have contributed more in actual amount during the same time) to our Sunday School Library. He began with a shilling, and increased it by sixpence a year, till it amounted to one dollar, which was the amount of his contribution for the year 1840. He began again the present year with the original shilling. Truly may it be said of him, as of the poor widow at the temple, that *he hath cast into the treasury more than they all.*

Note H. Page 15.

The following extract from the Church Records will explain the allusion in the text.

"May 4, 1823. The Church were requested to tarry after the Communion, to take into consideration the request of Mrs. Lucy Rice, wife of Mr. Benjamin Rice, to be dismissed and recommended to the Church in Westborough, under the pastoral care of Rev. Mr. Rockwood; the reason assigned for her request being, that she was not edified by the preaching usually heard in this place."

Mrs. Rice was a daughter of Deacon Nahum Fay, and had connected herself with the Congregational Church, August 16, 1818. My intercourse with her had been pleasant; — I had visited her in her family, had baptized her children, and did not suspect any disaffection on her part towards her minister, till near the time she sent in her request for a dismission. I afterwards learned that her mind had been a good deal disturbed in consequence of an impression she had received, from conversations with several persons of the Baptist denomination, and especially from witnessing the mode of baptism as practised by them, — that she had never been properly baptized. So strong was her persuasion, that this was the only proper mode of baptism, that it was with the greatest difficulty, as I understood, that her friends prevailed on her to remain connected with a Congregational Church. She was, besides, in a delicate state of health, and, as there is reason to think, at least for some part of the time, in a state of high nervous excitement. It was in this state of mind, and under these circumstances, that she left our communion. From this time her health continued to decline, till her death, which took place Nov. 25, 1824, at the early age of twenty-four. During her last sickness, I visited her occasionally, and was always cordially received; and except when she was too much exhausted, was always invited to pray with and for her. These visits I recal with much satisfaction, for they confirmed me in the belief I cherish and hold dear, that the great topics of consolation and support are such as belong to all the sincere followers of Christ, and cannot with justice be appropriated by any sect or denomination as exclusively theirs; and that differences of speculative belief are almost lost sight of on the death-bed of the meek and lowly disciple of Jesus. Peace be to her memory; — she was dear to me as one in whom dwelt a sincere, a trustful, and a loving spirit.

Note I. Page 15.

Some persons have inconsiderately applied the epithet Unitarian to this Church and Society. The title is one of which we need not be ashamed, for it refers to one of the prime articles of our faith, — *the personal unity of God*, which we believe to rest on the solid basis of Scripture and reason.

But against this Church and Society taking this for their denominational title, I *enter my solemn protest.* Our Church is, in fact, the First Congregational Church, and our Society the First Congregational Society in Northborough. It has never changed name or character; and this is the title by which we choose to be called. Let each Religious Society be called by its own name, — the name and denomination it has chosen for itself. And as one of these Societies is designated as "The First Baptist Society," and another as "The Evangelical Congregational Society," so this is, and should be, "The First Congregational Society" in the town of Northborough.

Note K. Page 16.

It was as early as 1822, that a committee was chosen by the Convention of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts, at their annual meeting in May, to inquire "what constitutes a Christian Church, with which we ought to hold communion as such?" The committee made their report at the meeting in May of the following year; the character of which report may be inferred from the fact, that a majority of the committee were of the class denominated "Orthodox." It was virtually a denial of the Christian name to their Unitarian brethren, and a recommendation to withhold Christian fellowship from them. This report, it was expected, would be adopted by a decided majority; but after it had been read, and a motion made by one of its friends to have it printed, and a copy sent to each member of the Convention, the venerable Dr. Pierce of Brookline arose and moved that the subject be indefinitely postponed. To the surprise of all and the joy of many, the motion prevailed by a great majority, many of the Orthodox members voting in its favor.

Note L. Page 16.

Among the ministers thus honorably distinguished, I may mention the late venerable and excellent Dr. Puffer, of Berlin, between whom and myself a friendly intercourse by way of exchanges and otherwise was maintained till his death, which took place on Fast day, April 9, 1829, at the age of 73. I visited, conversed and prayed with him on his death-bed, on which occasion he expressed an affectionate interest in my prosperity, and in that of the Church of which I was pastor, and gave me at parting his benediction.

Note M. Page 16.

The three persons referred to were — Lewis and Anna Fay, and Sophia Ball.

Note N. Page 16.

The following were the persons who asked a dismission at this time; namely, Nahum and Lucy Fay, Nathan and Susanna Ball, Grace Fay, and Alice Rice. Three of these had joined the Church under my ministry, the other three under that of my predecessor.

Note O. Page 17.

The original donation amounted to $3000, which was accepted by a unanimous vote of the town, the 7th of March, 1831, and a committee, consisting of the pastor, Stephen Williams, Esq., Col. Joseph Davis, Asaph Rice, and Phineas Davis, Esq. were chosen with full power to execute such an instrument in behalf of the town, as might be agreed upon by them and the said Gassett, for carrying the proposed donation into effect.

Such an instrument was accordingly drafted by Hon. John Davis and Pliny Merrick, Esq. of Worcester, and was duly executed, and the money paid into the hands of the committee on the 15th of the following July. The following extract from the aforesaid instrument will show how the interest of the fund is to be appropriated.

After making provision for the comfortable maintenance of two aged relatives, then living in this town, and for the gradual increase of the fund by the annual addition of one sixth of the interest of it, till it should amount to the sum of $4000, the instrument proceeds:

"4. So soon as the fund yields anything beyond the above annual appropriations for the said individuals and for its own increase, whatever it so yields shall annually be paid to the Congregational Society in said town, over which the Rev. Joseph Allen is now the settled minister, until the amount shall annually be equal to the sum of $750, for the support and maintenance of such ministers and preachers as said Society shall employ to preach the Gospel, so long as said Society shall exist, which sum shall be laid out for such purpose, under the direction and at the discretion of said Society, — the charity being intended for their benefit and relief; and it is to be paid into their treasury, — provided, however, and if the said Society shall cease to exist, or shall cease to maintain a good and convenient house for public worship, for an unreasonable length of time, upon or near to the spot where the present Meetinghouse stands, they shall, on the happening of either event, cease to enjoy the benefit of said annual sum, and the same shall remain with, and be the property of the said town, to be applied by them to the support and maintenance of a good public school, to be kept at some central place in said town, for the benefit of the inhabitants thereof forever."

Note P. Page 20.

The number of children connected with the Sunday School the present season is considerably less than it had been for several of the years immediately preceding, being only about 150; whereas in 1840, it was 195, in 1839, 189, in 1838, 193, and in 1837, 238. I cannot satisfactorily account for this falling off; though I am aware that several families have removed to other places, and that the large Bible Class of young ladies, which in 1837 amounted to 21, has been greatly diminished by drafts continually made upon it for teachers to supply the places of those who have left town, or relinquished the office of Sunday School Teachers, while the Bible Class of young men, which in the same year consisted of 15, has been wholly disbanded. Some, I fear, have left the school, who should have continued in it much longer. Let those whom it concerns see to it, that the Sunday School do not languish for want of patronage and encouragement.

Note Q. Page 20.

The Vestry was built by subscription in the spring and summer of 1833, the town having granted leave to the Parish to remove and raise the Town House for that purpose. The whole cost, including furniture, &c. was $894 53. The new pulpit was built and the Meetinghouse carpeted in January, 1838. The carpet was purchased by the ladies of the Society.

The Meetinghouse itself was built in 1808, at a cost, including the bell, of more than $11,000, and, having been always kept in good repair, has the appearance of a new house, and is, in fact, much superior to many modern churches.

A furnace was placed in the Church in Dec. 1824, at a cost of more than $300; for which, as not answering its purpose, two stoves were substituted in the autumn of 1835.

Note R. Page 21.

Among the calamitous events of the period under review, may be reckoned the mortal distemper among children, (scarlet fever,) which prevailed in this town, in the spring and summer of 1839. In the month of May the disease assumed a most malignant character, so as in many instances to baffle the powers of the medical art. But few families in the village escaped; and in some from three to six or seven were sick at the same time. Some parents were left childless. In one instance two sweet babes, and in another three, two of them twin-sisters, falling victims in quick succession to the fell destroyer. It was on the occasion of the death of the first of

the three, one of the twin-sisters, whose names were Adeline and Angeline, and the dangerous sickness of the other, that the following lines were composed, entitled,

THE SPIRIT'S INVITATION TO HER TWIN-SISTER UPON EARTH.

Sister, sister, come to me!
O what glorious forms I see!
What enchanting sounds I hear,
Bursting on my ravished ear!

Little children, hand in hand,
Round their Saviour smiling stand,
Chanting hymns and songs divine;
Come and join them, Angeline!

At one hour we came to Earth,
Let *one* be our heavenly birth,
With mortal things no longer stay,
Sister spirit, come away!

Mother, though it grieves your heart
From your little ones to part,
Father, in your tender care
Though no longer we can share,

Yet a heavenly Father's love
Waits to cherish us above,
And a home, Oh! happier far
Than our earthly mansions are.

All is purity and love
In the realms of bliss above;
Sin and sorrow are unknown,
Round our heavenly Father's throne.

Here we wait our Father's will
Some kind mission to fulfil;
Then with joy we fly, to shed
Blessings on some much-loved head.

And the trials that he sends,
Loss of children, loss of friends,
Though they fill with tears your eyes,
Are but "blessings in disguise,"

If they lead your souls to Him
Who, though tempted, knew no sin,
Who can for your sorrows feel,
And your wounded hearts can heal.

Mother, father, when you feel
Thoughts of heaven o'er you steal,
When you lift your hearts in prayer,
Think your children with you there.

Should your heavenly Father call
To his arms your last, your all,
Do not think him then unjust,
Nor his kindness e'er distrust.

Then, when all are gathered there,
Safe beneath his guardian care,
You can say with faith and love,
"All our treasures are above!"

During the month of May, nine children deceased, between the ages of fifteen months and nine years, and seven more in June and July, making sixteen in all. The whole number of cases must have exceeded an hundred. The last six years, beginning with 1835, have been marked by an unusual mortality; the average number of deaths during that period being nearly twenty-six annually, more than double the average number during the first half of my ministry.

I should be glad to preserve some memorial of the worthy citizens and valued friends, who have passed from among us within the last Quarter Century, besides the four deacons of whom some notice has been taken. There was Captain Samuel Wood, who commanded the company of minute men, that marched to Cambridge on receiving the news of the battle of Lexington, and who was wounded in the battle of Bunker Hill, a man of great firmness and resolution and decision of character, and of unsullied integrity. There was James Keyes, Esq., who for many years represented this town in the State Legislature, in whose good judgment and strict honesty the utmost confidence was reposed by all who knew him, a kind neigh-

bor and public spirited citizen. And then there was the generous-hearted and open-handed Col. John Crawford, brimful of wit and good-humor, and ready to every good work. And Col. William Eager, who loved the Sanctuary of God, who was versed in the Sacred Scriptures, and who took a warm interest in whatever related to the prosperity of the church, and the promotion of learning and religion. There was Phineas Davis, Esq., a strong and energetic man, imbued with practical good sense, firm and independent, not easily turned from his purpose. And Stephen Williams, Esq., a man of few words, but of acute observation and remarkable penetration, a man who knew not to flatter or deceive, one who despised meanness and abhorred duplicity, and whose kindness knew no bounds. But time would fail me, if I should attempt to commemorate all the worthy persons with whom I have been pleasantly associated, whose confidence I shared, and of whose kindness I had large experience. I have selected a few not because others are less worthy, but because these were men who more than others took a leading part in the affairs of the town, and whose influence therefore was more widely felt, as they were more generally known.

I should be glad, too, to record the virtues of the many excellent persons of the other sex, who have been taken from us during this period, leaving behind them the savor of a good name; whose steady friendship I enjoyed, and to whose encouragement and aid I feel that I am much indebted for whatever success has attended my ministrations in this place. But it would be an invidious task to select, where so many are worthy. Their loss is deeply deplored. Their memory is cherished by many warm and affectionate hearts. Their names, I doubt not, are written in the book of life. May their places be supplied by others, who shall possess a kindred spirit, and who shall be equally "zealous of good works."

LRL Ja 27

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